

Washington, D.C. - Rep. David Price (D-NC) offered remarks for the Congressional Record celebrating the 90th birthday of William C. "Bill" Friday, long-time President of the University of North Carolina system, this week. The text of Rep. Price's remarks is printed below.

Rep. David Price

July 14, 2010

Extension of Remarks: Honoring Bill Friday

Madame Speaker, I rise to honor William C. "Bill" Friday, the man whose name was synonymous with higher education in North Carolina for much of the 20th century. This week, he celebrated his 90th birthday.

Few North Carolinians are as well known or as widely respected as Bill Friday. Although he has never run for elected office, the former president of the University of North Carolina (UNC) system has been prominent in public affairs for decades and ranks as one of the most important American university presidents of the post-World War II era. As the longest-serving President of North Carolina's public university system, Bill Friday has been a friend to anyone and everyone educated in that system, anyone employed by that system, and anyone living in the vibrant towns and cities that surround our state's public universities.

Bill Friday was born in Raphine, Virginia, but he grew up in Dallas, North Carolina, a small community in Gaston County. He graduated from Dallas High School, where he played baseball and basketball, and went on to earn a bachelor's degree from North Carolina State University and a law degree from UNC Chapel Hill. He also served in the United States Naval Reserve during World War II.

Friday's entire professional life was spent in higher education. Before becoming president of the UNC system in 1957, he served as assistant dean of students at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill (1948-1951), assistant to the President of the Consolidated University of North Carolina (1951-1955), and Secretary of the University of North Carolina system. After a brief period as Acting President of the system, he was chosen to take the position permanently. It was a job at which he thrived.

Friday's tenure as UNC president spanned the greatest period of growth for higher education in American history, and he played a crucial role in shaping our sixteen-campus university during that time. Early on, the Council of Advancement and Support of Education identified Friday as the most effective public university president in the nation.

Bill Friday was a consistent supporter of academic freedom and integrity. During the civil rights movement, he often served as mediator between student activists and the conservative state legislature. He led a five-year effort to repeal the 1963 Speaker Ban Law, which prohibited campuses from hosting appearances by government critics. And he fought to keep tuition affordable so that limited means would not be a barrier to higher education.

Friday was also a visionary leader, and he pursued that vision in many areas. His involvement in the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education led to gains in North Carolina and the nation in federal funding for student aid in Pell Grants and the establishment of the Area Health Education Centers. He served as founding co-chair of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, which has worked persistently to reform college athletics. Friday helped to develop the National Humanities Center; he supported the establishment of North Carolina public radio through UNC; and he was instrumental in the creation and growth of the Research Triangle Park.

As Charlotte Observer associate editor Jack Betts noted about Bill Friday: "He often seemed to be everywhere, but he was always no further away than a telephone, willing to talk about state history, fully cognizant of the state's many needs and always enthusiastic about the progress the state could make through its various educational enterprises, especially the university. He was a university president, but at heart he has always been a teacher." I can certainly attest to this personally as the recipient of many Bill Friday notes and calls and as one who has benefitted enormously from his generous and wise counsel.

Friday has mentored university leaders, governors and presidents in the course of his public life and he has received a multitude of accolades – including just about every honor North Carolina has to bestow. These honors include the American Council on Education's National

Distinguished Service Award for Lifetime Achievement, the National Humanities Medal, the American Academy for Liberal Education's Jacques Barzun Award, and the John Hope Franklin Award. In 2004, the N.C. General Assembly held a special joint session to honor Friday's life and work. The legislature and then-Gov. Mike Easley presented William and Ida Friday with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine award for service to North Carolina.

Now retired from the university, Friday heads the William R. Kenan, Jr., Fund and the Kenan Charitable Trust. Friday also currently hosts a public television talk show, North Carolina People, which he began while still president of the UNC system. The show brings Tar Heel state residents insights from leaders in education, politics, business, and the arts, adding richly to our public discourse.

Even in retirement, Friday keeps an office at UNC Chapel Hill and serves as a formal and informal sounding board and dispenser of wisdom for students, administrators and others. The University of North Carolina System has given its state so much: public servants, educators and other professionals, small and large business leaders, innovative researchers, informed citizens: these make up the fabric that weaves together our communities. At 90, Bill remains fiercely dedicated to the idea that education is uniquely powerful, giving young people the tools they need to shape their lives, live out their dreams, and better society.

As Bill himself would insist, he has not achieved these great things on his own. He had the good fortune and good sense in 1942 to marry his wife Ida, who has been a lifetime partner in his service and civic endeavors. Their names grace a continuing education center in Chapel Hill and an education innovation center in Raleigh, both of which host hundreds of gatherings each year, promoting collaboration and furthering the causes to which the Fridays' lives have been dedicated.

Fortunately, nothing Bill Friday has done in the last few years suggests his life will begin to slow down as he turns 90. I am honored to know Bill and to call attention to his service to our state and her citizens. The Tar Heel State owes much to him.

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